

Mexican National Contract Labor

Because the AFSC has worked on both sides of the Mexico-U.S. border and because of our increasing concern for the human needs among farm workers, the Mexican National labor program lays a particular burden upon the AFSC.

Although the kinds of damage to human beings arising from this program are generally known, a list of some of these may help to bring them into focus.

1. It sets up conflict between U.S. residents dependent upon agricultural wages and the Nationals.
2. By helping to stabilize wages far below that of other occupations, it adds to the forces driving people out of agriculture.
3. It tends to undermine efforts in Mexico to develop basic economic programs for village betterment.
4. It breaks down family stability.
5. It encourages the treatment of people in the mass rather than as individuals.
6. International understanding on a personal basis is neglected if not worsened.
7. There are many instances of physical suffering and want.

It has been very difficult to discover practical approaches in keeping with Friends testimonies. At the same time, the need for reconciliation is growing rapidly. Involved in this need are U.S. farm workers, growers, labor contractors; local state and federal officials in several different agencies: Mexican officials at different levels, camp operators, and local village leaders.

One way to state the problem is that it must be met at two apparently conflicting points at the same time: A - to improve the conditions and human relations of Nationals; B - to strengthen the position and improve the condition of U.S. resident farm workers.

Stated another way: How can Mexican agricultural workers best serve the interest of both U.S. and Mexican communities? What can be done to work in this direction starting with the situation as it is?

Making a start on this problem area would have a marked effect upon many other AFSC programs.

TO: Phil Buskirk
FROM: Bard
DATE: February 11, 1957
RE: Mexican National Contract Labor

I am wondering about the statement entitled "Mexican National Contract Labor" which I received from you the other day. Is this a policy statement from the Santa Clara Community Relations Committee, the Social Industrial Committee, or a statement prepared by you to stimulate discussion in your committee?

To date, the local advisory committee has spent most of its time discussing operational mechanics, and practically no time discussing a basic philosophy operational mechanics, and practically no time discussing a basic philosophy toward the problem of seasonal farm labor. I suspect that we will be getting into this matter in the next few months. I have done quite a bit of investigation in the problem of the Mexican National, have read everything I could find in print on the subject, and have discussed the operation of the program with labor union officials, growers, administrators of the program and "innocent bystanders". Due to my lack of facility with Spanish, I have not been able to discuss the problem with any of the Nationals, although I have been able to discuss the problem with any of the Nationals, although I have talked with several crew leaders. Each group seems to look at the problem from a pre-conceived bias and I find little to no objectivity. Perhaps you could help me with a concrete analysis of the reasons behind your statement #2.

Last week I was talking ~~xx~~ with Frank Reyes, who is working with the Migrant Ministry at Brawley, and he feels there is absolutely no question about the relationship between the 70 cent an hour prevailing wage and the Mexican National Program. However, in Tulare County, in the 18 months that I have been watching the program, the going wage has increased from 75 cents to the present \$1.00 an hour. At the same time the percentage of Nationals working in the County has increased. The increase in wages in San Joaquin and Stanislaus Counties, however, has not been as great.

Item 3 in your statement is a concept I have heard only from the Catholic brotherhood, and I am afraid that I will have to say that honestly I don't believe that they are too concerned about basic economic problems or village betterment either.

Item 5 of your statement might be interpreted to mean that you favor the pattern used with Contract Nationals from Japan and the Philippines, in which there is no intergovernmental agreement. Personally, I feel that these agreements are the worst of the bunch.

Certainly your Item 7 is very true. Is it in any way directly connected with the National Contract Labor Program?

You state the problem as being a two-pointed dilemma, but I wonder if the problem isn't really a three-headed monster, with the third head being the problem of the grower.